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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF DAS YAMAMOTO AND AF/E
ROME PARIS LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KPKO](#) [ER](#) [ET](#) [EE](#) [BORDER](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA-ERITREA: UNMEE'S WITHDRAWAL COULD PROMPT
ETHIOPIAN INTERVENTION

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 3747

[B](#). ADDIS ABABA 3725

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON:
1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. UNMEE DSRSG Amb. Azouz Ennifar does not foresee the imminent outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and dismisses recent public statements by UN officials in New York and Asmara as overly alarming. On the other hand, UNMEE itself could precipitate armed confrontation, were it to withdraw. Amb. Ennifar warns that UNMEE's withdrawal would create a vacuum that Ethiopian FM Seyoum said Ethiopia would fill through re-occupation of the Temporary Security Zone. PM Meles also implied as much to Charge, by reminding her that Ethiopia had in the past and could in the future maintain the security zone without the UNMEE. However, we assume Eritrea would not accept Ethiopia replacing UNMEE. Ambassador Ennifar reiterated his request to the USG to assist with aerial surveillance so that peace-keepers would not longer be blind to movements of troops in the TSZ and outside it. Ennifar firmly believes that a comprehensive economic and political package acceptable to both governments could resolve the dispute. Ethiopia's National Security advisor told Charge the same thing. USG engagement, including the immediate appointment of an American to serve as UN special envoy, is key to addressing the stalemate. Ennifar was surprised and concerned when Charge mentioned a delay in naming the US envoy. Both Ennifar and Charge agreed that the US envoy was key to a peaceful resolution and had a fair chance of success if he approached the issue in a comprehensive manner. The November 6-8 UNSC mission to the region aims to express support for UNMEE, but is unlikely to address the parties' key concerns. END SUMMARY.

UNMEE PULLOUT MAY PROMPT ETHIOPIAN INTERVENTION

[1](#)2. (C) Recent public statements on Ethiopia-Eritrea from UN headquarters (e.g., November 2 UN SYG statement expressing concern about troop movements) are overly alarming, according to Amb. Azouz Ennifar, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (DSRSG) for the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). In a November 4 meeting with Charge and deputy P/E chief, Ennifar asserted that UNMEE SRSRG Legwaila had been blind-sided by such a statement attributed to an UNMEE spokesman in Asmara. Ennifar said he did not foresee the imminent outbreak of hostilities, and noted that UN peace-keepers in Cyprus monitored a peaceful stalemate that had lasted for years.

[1](#)3. (C) Ennifar (strictly protect) attributed "alarmist" reports to UNMEE Force Commander Major General Rajender Singh trying to safeguard his Indian troops, who had only suffered a single casualty thus far (from a non-combat-related traffic accident). He criticized UNMEE's evacuation of dependents, many of whom had resided in the area for as long as five years, for creating the impression that the mission was on the verge of "collapsing." UNMEE needed to be realistic; it was "ridiculous," he said, that UNMEE and UN headquarters had discussed "temporary pullout" as an option.

[1](#)4. (C) Ennifar reiterated concern that continued Eritrean restrictions on UNMEE could lead India and Jordan to withdraw their contingents, who comprise the majority of UNMEE forces in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). According to Ennifar, India's ambassador to Ethiopia had said that if there were no change within 30 to 60 days, then "we'll pull our people."

[1](#)5. (C) Ennifar reported that Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum had informed him that were UNMEE to withdraw, then Ethiopia would seek to re-occupy the TSZ, as Ethiopia's previous retreat had been conditioned on UNMEE's establishment of the TSZ. Charge said that PM Meles had stated to her that prior to UNMEE, Ethiopia had administer the TSZ and could do so in the future. Ennifar and Charge both agreed that such a scenario would not be acceptable to Eritrea and could lead to confrontation because the TSZ is entirely composed of land awarded to Eritrea by the boundary

commission.

INCREASED MILITARY ACTIVITY NEAR BORDER

16. (C) On the other hand, the UN should not report that the border situation is stable, Ennifar said. "Major moves are going on," he noted, especially during nightfall, when the GSE restricted UNMEE's active monitoring. Potentially troubling developments on the Eritrean side included:
-- the sighting of several new T-52 tanks, near the port of Assab, in contrast to older, less serviceable T-52s previously identified by UNMEE and located between Assab and the TSZ;
-- the Eritrean military conducting air operations, involving helicopters, in the TSZ;
-- the frequency of senior Eritrean military commanders visiting the TSZ; and
-- the GSE's re-conscription of previously discharged draftees.

17. (C) Ennifar said UNMEE did not have information on the location of Eritrean troops moving away from the border with Sudan, but underscored that, as a result of GSE restrictions, UNMEE could only monitor 40 per cent of the border. He reiterated UNMEE SRSG Legwaila's October 26 request to the USG for aerial or satellite surveillance (ref B), noting that the UN did not need the imagery itself but only the analysis. (Comment: It would reassure the UNMEE troops if we could provide them with satellite images and or information regarding troop deployment. One of the reasons they are nervous is their inability to ascertain what is going on in the TSZ.)

NEED TO PROMOTE MUTUAL ECONOMIC INTERESTS

18. (C) Although the parties agreed on 85 per cent of the border, building consensus on demarcation of the remainder remained difficult, Ennifar said. Eritrea sought the return of three key areas: Badme, the Sitona triangle, and parts of its southern border. Ennifar said he wished that PM Meles would not include the "accepted in principle" April 2002 decision of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC), because he believes that in fact were Eritrea to agree to discussions, Ethiopia would agree to demarcation along similar lines as the delimitation. Charge pointed out that she had met with Meles's National Security advisor earlier that day. He had suggested that a comprehensive package for normalizing relations was key to a successful resolution of the border dispute. In this package Badme would be only a footnote, the bigger issue being economic (septel).

19. (C) Charge said that she believed that the issues of resettlement, access to the port of Assab, and economic cooperation were critical to Ethiopia. Ennifar noted that Ethiopian FM Seyoum had identified access to the Eritrean port of Assab, not the contested status of Badme, as the major issue that had to be discussed between landlocked Ethiopia and its neighbor. Charge said so had Ethiopian General Zamora. Developing Assab would primarily benefit Ethiopia, as Eritrea relied on the port of Massawa, Ennifar said. Ennifar advocated a comprehensive economic development package involving World Bank assistance, saying the parties themselves could not supply a solution to the current stalemate.

USG ENGAGEMENT IS KEY

110. (C) Ennifar hailed US plans to name a UN special envoy, saying that US leadership was key to resolving the stalemate. Neither the UN nor the AU was playing a significant role, Ennifar explained. When Charge indicated that there was a hang-up between the US and the UN in naming the envoy, he expressed his surprise and considerable concern and urged that we resolve the problem quickly.
-- UN SYG Annan was considering visiting the region again, but was not likely to be successful in Asmara, which had forbidden him from flying directly to Addis Ababa during his previous visit in July 2004.
-- Japanese PermRep Amb. Kenzo Oshima's visit, on behalf of the UNSC, would be limited to providing "confidence and support to UNMEE." Oshima would join Ethiopian FM Seyoum at a November 7 working lunch in Addis Ababa, and meet with UNSC ambassadors at Charge's residence, and then meet the following day with the UNMEE Force Commander and GSE Commissioner in Asmara. However, Oshima was not scheduled to meet either PM Meles nor President Isaias.

111. (C) Ennifar said no progress had been made in pushing the parties to participate in either a war reparations commission, or a commission to investigate the causes of the war, both mechanisms established by existing accords between Ethiopia and Eritrea. He called for modifying the existing

UNMEE mandate to allow the SRSG to play a political (as opposed to simply administrative) role, consistent with other UN peace-keeping missions.

12. (C) COMMENT: As the situation on the border becomes more critical, it also becomes more urgent to name the US envoy to avoid miscalculations on both sides. END COMMENT.
HUDDLESTON